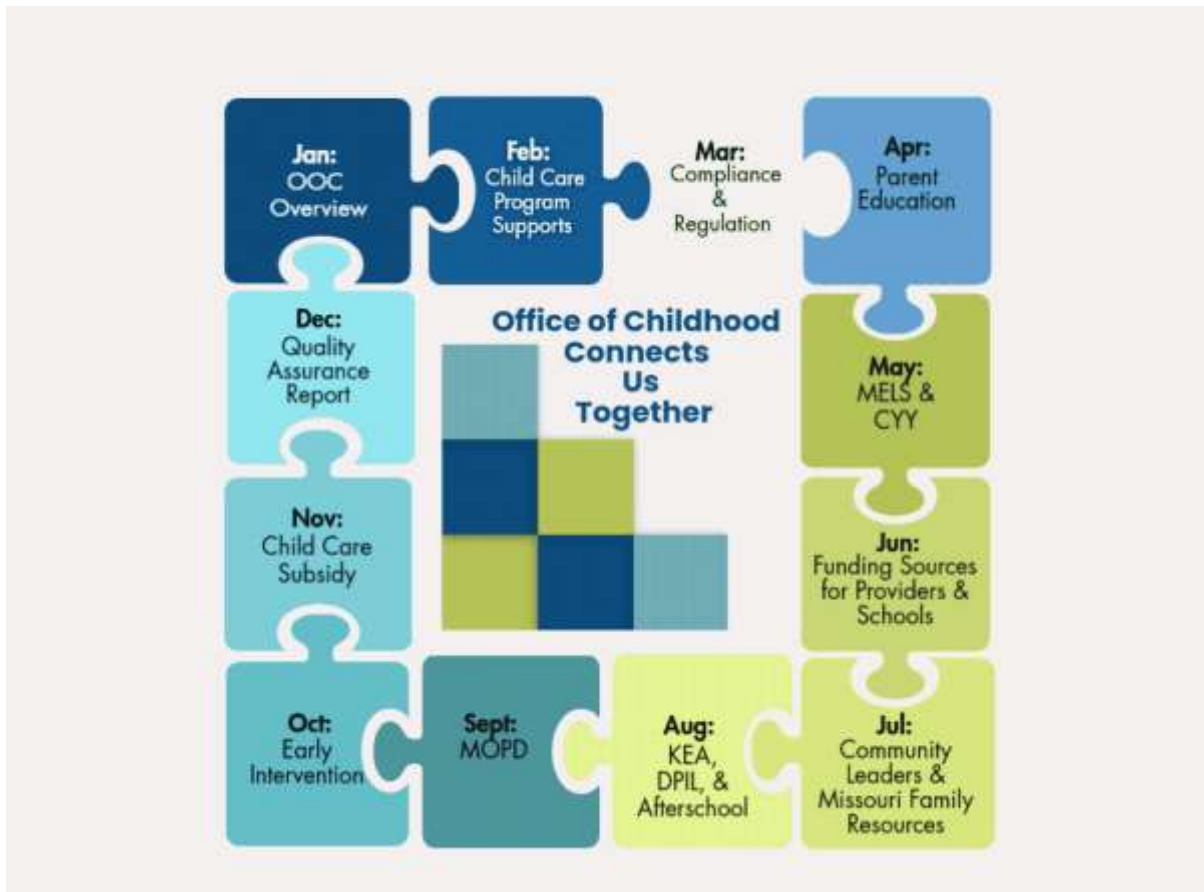




Childhood Connections

March 18, 2026

Office of Childhood Connects Us Together



In 2026, we are taking a closer look at the Office of Childhood (OOC) by exploring the different programs that work together to support children, families, and professionals across Missouri. In this year's newsletter series, we will spend each month highlighting different OOC programs. OOC is made up of many unique and connected parts and each plays an important role. Together, all these programs are a part of a larger system that supports families statewide. By breaking down each piece, we aim to show how OOC fits together and build a better understanding of the value of our work.



Child Care

This month we are highlighting the Child Care Compliance and Regulations teams. These teams play an essential role in supporting safe, healthy, and quality learning environments by overseeing child care licensing and leading updates to Missouri's child care rules. While much of this work happens behind the scenes, it directly impacts providers, educators, children, and families.

The Compliance and Regulations Section's work reflects OOC's commitment to transparency, communication, and continuous improvement. By updating licensing rules with provider input at the center, this team is helping to create clearer, more consistent rules that support safe environments for children and practical guidance for providers. As one important piece of the OOC puzzle, Compliance and Regulations helps ensure that Missouri's childhood system remains strong, responsive, and focused on children and families.

[Read about this amazing team, what they do, and how they can help you here.](#)

NEWS

COMING SOON! Child Care Licensing 2026 Informational Sessions



OOC staff will be hosting informational sessions across the state to discuss high-level changes to child care licensing rules.

Informational sessions will be held in regional areas of the state in late March and throughout April 2026. Watch for more information on these sessions in This Week @ OOC messages.

Read more in [this article](#) or at the [Child Care Licensing Rule Revision \(Executive Order 25-15\) webpage](#).

Reminder! Subsidy Provider Renewal Application Timeline



Child care subsidy providers may complete their renewal application up to 90 days before their contract end date by selecting the "Renew Application" button in the provider portal.

It is important to submit a renewal application, be in compliance with all child care subsidy, and, if applicable, licensing or license-exempt requirements before the contract expires.

This will prevent disruptions to your services as a contracted child care subsidy provider.

Use the checklist under the "[Renew Child Care Subsidy Provider Contract](#)" tab on [the Subsidy Provider information page](#) to prepare for the renewal.

Updating Your Subsidy Authorization List

Did you know? If a child care subsidy provider has children authorized to their program who are not enrolled in the program, you can contact



CCFamilies@dese.mo.gov to have those authorizations removed from your authorization list.

Help Prevent Childhood Blindness



Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP) is an eye condition caused by abnormal retinal blood vessel development in premature or low birth weight infants, and it can lead to lifelong vision impairment. Early screening, timely treatment, and ongoing eye care are critical to preventing vision loss from ROP.

To support families and raise awareness, Prevent Blindness offers free resources through its ROP Education and Support Program, including fact sheets, videos, and social media materials in English and Spanish.

Learn more and access materials on the [Prevent Blindness "What is Retinopathy of Prematurity" page](#).

EVENTS

Child Advocacy Day is Coming Up!



Be a Champion of Children! **Child Advocacy Day will be held on Wednesday, March 25, 2026, at the Missouri State Capitol.**

For more than 40 years, Child Advocacy Day has brought childhood programs, parent educators, home visiting programs, advocates, parents, and community members together at the Missouri State Capitol to support children's development, well-being, and safety.

[Click here to learn more about this event.](#) The Missouri Parents as Teachers Association (MOPATA) [has created an Advocacy Toolkit](#) that includes great information for Missouri's Parent Education Programs.

National Home Visiting Week

The Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals announced the 2nd Annual National



Home Visiting Week (NHVW) for 2026. The dates are April 20-24, 2026. This is a time to celebrate and recognize home visitors/parent educators and the important impact they make on family and child outcomes. The Institute has created materials and resources that are available on their website for programs to use during the [2026 National Home Visiting Week](#).

"Pinwheels of Possibilities" Child Abuse Prevention Month Parade and Resource Fair



The Office of the Child Advocate is sharing information about the Child Abuse Prevention Month parade and resource fair taking place on April 11, 2026, in Jefferson City!

You can view the parade map and invite your friends on the event page below!

For more information or to register your organization for the parade or resource fair visit the [parade webpage](#).

CELEBRATE! Week of the Young Child



April 11 – 17, 2026, is the **Week of the Young Child!**

Celebrate children and early learning this week with activities that highlight the critical role of play, creativity, and collaboration in a child's development.

Whether building, cooking, singing, or creating, you can help children learn through fun-filled projects.

For a list of themed activities for young children, from Music Monday to Family Friday, visit [WOYC Activities and Resources](#).

Office of Childhood is Calling All Superheroes



Child Care Provider Appreciation Day is on Friday, May 8. This year, the Office of Childhood is celebrating child care providers, the real superheroes.

Every day you show up for the children. You may not wear capes (though you can in a staff photo you share with us). Your superhero powers may be hugs, patience, compassion, and successfully

planning snack time. But we know the impact you have is truly heroic.

We are creating a special video to recognize and highlight Missouri's incredible early care and education providers. We would love for your team to join in on the fun! [Please use this link to send a recent photo of all staff](#). And for added fun, feel free to dress as superheroes with capes, masks, or themed shirts, just run with it!

We can't wait to showcase the superhero teams who make a positive difference in the lives of children.

Thank you for being everyday superheroes!

Grant Opportunities

Afterschool Competitive Grant Opportunities



The Office of Childhood's Afterschool Program has **two** competitive grants for school age-afterschool programs that are now open: the **21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC)** grant and the **School Age Community (SAC)** grant.

For more information and to find the afterschool grants' application and guidelines, please go to the [Afterschool \(School Age\) Page](#).

Awards are subject to availability of funding. The deadline for both grant applications is **1:00 p.m. on Friday, April 24, 2026**. Questions may be sent to afterschool@dese.mo.gov.

Training Opportunities

Free Assessment Tools for First Steps Providers for Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing



As part of the Language Equality and Acquisition for Deaf Kids (LEAD-K) activities, DESE has partnered with Missouri State University to provide free assessment tools to Missouri First Steps providers working with children who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Read more in [this article on available assessment tools](#) or visit [DESE's Early Connections website for LEAD-K resources](#) to share with parents.

QAR Program Highlights



Congratulations to the programs that have achieved a quality designation through the Quality Assurance Report (QAR). Read [this article for the list of programs](#).

THANK YOU! 53rd Conference on the Young Years



Thank you to the more than 1,800 Early Childhood Professionals who joined us for the 53rd Conference on the Young Years (CY Y)!

Read a [special thank you from the OOC Planning Committee here](#).

Mark your calendars for the **2027 Conference on the Young Years**, tentatively scheduled for March 4–6, 2027.

A call for presentation proposals for the 2027 conference will open in May 2026. Watch the [CY Y webpage](#) for updates.

MOPD Monthly Tip



After completing clock hour trainings, your attendance will be issued by the trainer to your MOPD System account within 30 days. You are responsible for providing correct information about yourself to the trainer including your MOPD ID, full name, and email used with MOPD. Training credit will only show on your MOPD System report once you create your MOPD account and complete your profile.

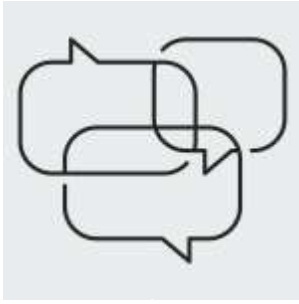
Reach out to the MOPD System Navigators at MOPD@dese.mo.gov with any questions.

Job Vacancies



The OOC is hiring and we would love to have you join our team! Click [this link](#) to see open positions.

We Want To Know



Share your stories with the Office of Childhood!

Submit news and updates about Missouri Early Care and Education!

Or email OOCOutreach@dese.mo.gov.

Miss Something?

[Visit the OOC webpage to find previous editions of Childhood Connections.](#)

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